

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF FIVE POEMS BY ALFRED DE VIGNY
"MOISE," "LA MAISON DU BERGER," "LA COLERE DE SAMSON,"
"LE MONT DES OLIVIER," AND "LA MORT DU LOUP"

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Each literary movement develops its favorite themes. Love, death, religion, nature and nationalism became the great themes of the romantic period. The treatment of these themes by the precursors of romanticism was later interpreted and developed by the major romantic poets, Alphonse de Lamartine, Victor Hugo, Alfred de Musset and Alfred de Vigny.

During my various studies of literature, the Romantic Movement has been my favorite period because of the lyrical manner in which the poets express themselves. The presentations of their themes are extremely subjective, thus affecting the emotional state of the reader. In reading many of the poems of this period, one is led into an imaginary and fanciful sphere as the poet describes some of his most beautiful experiences. There are, however, some works which reveal bitter experiences in his life and the treatment of these subjects is numerous. It was noted, in my studies of the French romantic poets, Lamartine, Musset, Hugo, and Vigny, that many of them repeatedly presented their sorrows in their poems.

There was one among this group, Alfred de Vigny, who did not follow the general trends of that period, that of personal sentimental expressions. It is because of his individuality that I have chosen to study and to critically analyze five of his poems: "Moïse," "La Maison du Berger," "La Colère de Samson," "Le Mont des Oliviers," "La Mort du

Loup." I thus hope to establish his philosophical position in the Romantic School. Although I do not agree with his philosophy of stoicism and pessimism, I find his poems very thought provoking as he reveals by the use of symbols, his philosophy of life.

Alfred de Vigny was the most philosophical and pessimistic of the French romantic poets. The disillusionments which he experienced in military life, in his marriage, in the incurable illness of his mother, and finally in the unfaithfulness of his mistress, forced him to arrive at a pessimistic view of life and of the world. Vigny did not make personal references to these disappointments in his poems in the manner of his contemporaries. In a very ingenious and admirable manner, he disguised his sentiments by the use of symbols. He used Biblical and medieval stories and injected his philosophy in the reflections of his heroes.

The heroes of his poems usually are leaders of a society who are misunderstood by the common people. He paints a majestic and dignified atmosphere in which the heroes of his poems are placed. Vigny, in the second section of many of his poems, usually causes his heroes to give a long discourse on the unhappy state of his, the hero's, life. Many of the actions of these poems take place at night, a technique which may be assumed to symbolize the somber view the poet had of life.

Vigny, although he appears essentially different from the other romantic poets, shares with them their melancholy, their individualism, and their concept of the unappreciated genius. In the second chapter, "The Origin and Development of the Romantic Themes," an attempt is made to show how the romantic poets accepted and interpreted the major themes,

thus demonstrating the individuality of Alfred de Vigny. Before discussing the interpretation of the major themes exploited by the romantic poets, mention is made of the four precursors and of their contributions to French Romantic Movement. Although there were general themes and concepts to which most poets adhered during this era, each poet differed occasionally in the expression or interpretation of them. This is the beauty of the romantic period, the stress on the individual himself; therefore, each poet expressed his personal sentiments on the themes. In discussing the development of the major romantic themes, attention is devoted to the manner in which Lamartine, Hugo, Musset and Vigny accepted and interpreted them. In this chapter, it will be noted that Alfred de Vigny varied from his contemporaries in the interpretations of the major themes.

Chapter three is devoted to the life of Alfred de Vigny, emphasizing the various disappointments which probably influenced and shaped his pessimistic outlook on life. In contrast to the previous chapter, an attempt is made to show the ideas he shared with his contemporaries. An analysis, therefore, is made of the poem, "Moïse," which reveals his opinion the loneliness of a man of genius, the poet. All four poets appear to be mutually agreed on this theme; therefore, "Moïse" was chosen for analysis in this chapter. The theme on the poet reappears in the poem, "La Maison du Berger," which is analyzed in chapter four.

In chapter four, another aspect of the philosophy of Alfred de Vigny is analyzed. The poems, "La Maison du Berger," and "La Colère de Samson," the poet unveils his pessimistic attitude as he speaks of, and sees only the unfaithful and perfidious nature of woman. These two

poems are beautifully written, and they express very well the poet's view of nature, and poetry. In the analysis of these two poems, an attempt is made to show how the disappointments the poet experienced in his love affairs forced him toward pessimism. In chapter five, the poems chosen for analysis further exemplify his adoption of the philosophy of pessimism.

Alfred de Vigny, after experiencing many disappointments in life developed a pessimistic and stoical attitude which was revealed in his writings. The poems, "Le Mont des Oliviers," and "La Mort du Loup," have been chosen to explain this definitive philosophy. Vigny, in "Le Mont des Oliviers," discusses the futility of prayer. The final stanza ends with his reasoning which directs one's attention to stoicism. The analysis of "La Mort du Loup," then follows thus concluding the study of his philosophy.

The philosophical, romantic poet did not publish many poems, but whatever he wrote portrayed his philosophy. These five poems have revealed to us the great and unique thinker of the romantic poets. Although his beliefs are sometimes different from those of his contemporaries, he is still classed among the romanticists because of his truly imaginative mind and his self-revelation. The conclusion, which is the final section of chapter five, will substantiate the conclusion that Alfred de Vigny was the philosopher among the romantic poets.

CHAPTER II

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROMANTIC THEMES

After the French Revolution, the literary works in France experienced a tremendous revival which was named the Romantic Movement. One author, in describing this movement, termed it "a new Renaissance;"¹ rightly so because the Romantic Movement was a reawakening of man's imagination. Although this literary change progressed greatly after the Revolution no set date can be attributed to its beginning because various writers of the classical period expressed sentiments which were later adopted and expounded upon by the romanticists. (It is not within the realm of this thesis to discuss the entire Romantic Movement; therefore, emphasis will be placed upon Romantic poetry only.)

Like all literary movements, romanticism possessed its favorite themes which were "love, death, nature, religion and nationalism." These themes were not new to the romantic poets, but the manner in which they were interpreted formed the basis for this new movement. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, André Chenier, Mme de Staël, and René Chateaubriand were among the first writers in France who treated these themes in the manner of the romantic poets. (English and German writers exerted a great deal of influence upon the French romanticists; however, this

¹ Jean Giraud, L'Ecole Romantique Française (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1947), p. 3.

discussion on the influences of romanticism is limited to French personalities.)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau has been called by many the grandfather of the romantic movement because he was one of the earliest writers to discuss the themes which were common to the romantic poets. In his novel, La Nouvelle Héloïse,¹ Rousseau explained that by projecting one's self into nature it was possible to paint and express the individual feelings of mankind. This fusion of two was accepted and individually interpreted by the romantic poets.

Although Rousseau did not write poems, his prose seemed to express poetic traits. His descriptions were vivid and his language suited his works adequately. In Les Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire, Rousseau wrote:

Depuis quelques jours on avait achevé la vendange;
les promeneurs de la ville s'étaient déjà retirés;
les paysans aussi quittaient les champs jusqu' aux
travaux d'hiver. La campagne, encore verte et riante,
offrait partout l'image de la solitude et des approches de
l'hiver.²

This description shows imagination, feeling, reveries and solitude, all of which the romantic poets displayed in their poems. The picturesque vocabulary, as evidenced in the above passage, appeared also in some of the romantic poems.

In another section of Les Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire, Rousseau

¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, La Nouvelle Héloïse, ed. J. E. Morel (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1937), p. 40.

² Rousseau, Les Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire, ed. Pierre Richard (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1941), p. 24.

discussed his solitary position in life which was far more attractive to him than the evils of society.¹ The romantic poets developed this anti-social view in their works.

André Chenier, another of the precursors of the romantic movement, was helpful in the preparation of romanticism. Ramon Guthrie, in speaking of Chenier and his role as forerunner of romanticism, stated: "A minor poet, half Greek, was summoned from his grave to bless its cradle."² This was Chenier's primary function towards the development of the Romantic Movement.

Unlike the other precursors, Chenier returned to antiquity for sources for most of his poems. His approach, however, to these ancient stories was new. According to him, poems should be both modern and ancient. In his doctrine of original imitation he believed that the poet should imitate the ancients and produce the works in a modern way suitable to that era in which he lived.³ He expressed this opinion on original imitation in his poem "L'Invention:"

Les coutumes d'alors, les sciences, les mœurs
Respirent dans les vers des antiques auteurs.
Leur siècle est en dépôt dans leurs nobles volumes.
Tout a changé pour nous, mœurs, sciences, coutumes.
Pourquoi donc nous faut-il, par un pénible soin, ...
Dire et dire cent fois ce que nous avons lu?⁴

¹
Ibid.

²
Ramon Guthrie, French Literature and Thought Since the Revolution (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942), p. 3.

³
N. H. Clement, Romanticism in France (New York: Modern Language Association, 1939), p. 160.

⁴
André Chenier, "L'Invention," Oeuvres Complètes, ed. Gerard Walter (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1958), p. 125.

Many of the romantic poets recognized this thought and looked into the past for inspiration.

André Chenier was noted for his love of beauty. In his works, he painted and described his scenes very artistically. His use of personification was very suitable in his poems because it added to the atmosphere he was creating. In "La Jeune Tarentine" he wrote:

Pleurez, donc alcyons, ô vous, oiseaux sacrés,
Oiseaux chers à Thetis, doux alcyons, pleurez.
Elle a vécu, Myrto, la jeune Tarentine. ...
Une clef vigilante a pour cette journée
Dans le cèdre enfermé sa robe d'hyménée
Et l'or dont au festin ses bras seraient parés
Et pour ses blonds cheveux les parfums préparés.¹

Many of the romantic poets applied this concept of beauty, and creative atmosphere in their poems.

Mme de Stael has been named among the romantic precursors because of her important contributions to the theory of the Romantic Movement and models of subjective literary works. She treated subjects on passions, the need for individual happiness, melancholy, solitude, and nationalism. Her fame, however, as a precursor of romanticism remains in the fact that she named the movement. In her book, De l'Allemagne, she wrote:

Le nom de romantisme a été introduit nouvellement
en Allemagne, pour désigner la poésie dont les
chants des troubadours ont été l'origine, celle
qui est née de la chevalerie et du christianisme.²

¹

Chenier, "La Jeune Tarentine," ed. Gerard Walter, Ibid., p. 11.

²

Mme de Staël, De l'Allemagne, quoted in Andre Lagarde and Laurent Michard, Dix-neuvième siècle, Vol. V: Collection Textes et Littérature, (Paris: Bordas, 1961), p. 17.

In this work she described the literature of Germany and the appreciation the Germans had for imagination and personal feelings in their literary works. Imagination and personal feelings were qualities the French romantic poets developed in their poems.

François-René de Chateaubriand formed a definite link between these two periods; the classical and the romantic. He elaborated upon the themes of melancholy, individualism, and personal feelings previously stated by Rousseau and Mme de Staël.

Like Rousseau, Chateaubriand traced the passions of his characters in nature. However, the nature he described was immense and unkempt where the characters felt themselves completely surrounded by this wild expanse. Chateaubriand described the insatiable desires of his hero, Rene who was in the midst of this wild nature.

Mais comment exprimer cette foule de sensations fugitive, que j'éprouvais dans mes promenades? Les sons que rendent les passions dans le vide d'un coeur solitaire ressemblent au murmure que les vents et les eaux font entendre dans le silence d'un désert; on en jouit, mais on ne peut les peindre.¹

The romantic poets further developed this theme of ennui which so many of them possessed.

Catholicism, another theme of the romantic period was exalted by Chateaubriand in Le Génie du Christianisme. He traced the beauty of things around him and showed how Christianity formed the basis of life. In one section of Le Génie du Christianisme, he described an evening in the desert; here he saw the sun slowly sinking into the horizon, and

¹
René Chateaubriand, Le Génie du Christianisme, quoted in Lagarde and Michard, Ibid., p. 42.

the moon in all its splendor supplied light for the night. In this simple routine he found the greatness of God and His creation.¹

This was the origin of the new literary movement in France. Intelligence and reason were replaced by imagination and feeling. From the past, the romantic poets; Lamartine, Musset, Hugo and Vigny had received inspirations toward Medievalism, melancholy, passionate expressions of nature, and sentimentality. The four precursors; Rousseau, Chenier, Mme de Staël, and Chateaubriand, had influenced their reflections. Although the romantic poets were greatly influenced by the four precursors, each poet differed in his interpretation of the themes. It is, therefore, necessary to examine the development of these themes by each poet.

Love, one of the four major themes, was by no means a new theme to any literary movement. It had been treated in various ways. As the concepts of love changed throughout the ages, Rousseau introduced a new outlook.

In La Nouvelle Héloïse, Rousseau treated physical love and defended its gratifications. He fused love with nature and he placed his characters in breath-taking landscapes which remained as souvenirs of their love.² Most of the romanticists accepted this new concept of love as shown by Rousseau.

Love, therefore, became the basic theme of the romantic period.

¹

Ibid., p. 46.

²

Rousseau, La Nouvelle Héloïse, p. 36.

The poets proclaimed that the only worthwhile thing in life was love.¹ Lamartine, the first of the romantic poets, fused his love and his passionate feelings with nature. In his poem, "Le Lac" he tried to remember his love by the picturesque landscape which witnessed their love, he wrote:

Que le vent qui gémit, le roseau qui soupire,
Que les parfums légers de ton air embaume,
Que tout ce qu'on entendu, l'onvoit ou l'on respire,
Tout dise: Ils ont aime!²

In speaking of his loved one Lamartine elevated her to a supernatural being.

Les saints flambeaux jetaient une dernière flamme;
Le prêtre murmurait ces doux chants de la mort,
Pareils aux chants plaintifs que murmure une femme
A l'enfant qui s'endort.³

Lamartine exaggerated the description of his loved one's death, but this overstatement shows the lofty position in which he has placed her; even a priest is there to guide her along. In reality, this did not happen; however, this elevation of the loved ones was used by some of the romantic poets. Lamartine was deeply moved by love and in many of his poems he wrote of loved ones.

Victor Hugo treated love from many points of view. He has composed numerous poems, therefore, it is difficult to give a true picture of

1

Clement, op. cit., p. 339.

2

Alphonse de Lamartine, "Le Lac," Premières et Nouvelles Méditations Poétiques, quoted in Elliott M. Grant, French Poetry of the Nineteenth Century (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1957), p. 36.

3

Lamartine, "Le Crucifix," Secondes Méditation Poétiques, quoted in Grant, Ibid., p. 37.

his concept of love. In one of his poems he wrote:

Que nul soin ne te tourmente.
Aimons-nous! Aimons toujours!-
La chanson la plus charmante
Est la chanson des amours.¹

Yet, in another he combined God with love:

Aimez donc! car tout le proclame,
Car l'esprit seul eclaire peu
Et souvent le coeur d'une femme
Est l'explication de Dieu.²

Hugo declared that the heart was made happy in loving:

Heureux qui peut aimer, et qui dans la nuit noire,
Tout en cherchant la foi, peut rencontrer l'amour!
Il a du moins la lampe en attendant le jour.
Heureux ce coeur! aimer, c'est la moitié de croire.³

Then, Hugo mentioned another type of love when he said that love was universal. Even the beast experienced love. Mankind should possess this element, and they too would be loved:

J'aime l'araignée et j'aime l'ortie ...
La vilaine bête et la mauvaise herbe
Murmurent. Amour!⁴

He showed how nature too was intoxicated by love:

¹
Victor Hugo, "Viens! - une flûte invisible," Les Contemplations I quoted in Oeuvres Complètes de Victor Hugo, Poésie V (Paris: Hetzel and Quantin, 1882), p. 147.

²
Hugo, "Caeruleum Mare," Les Rayons et Les Ombres, quoted in Oeuvres Complètes de Victor Hugo, Poésie III, p. 551.

³
Hugo, "A Mlle Louise B. ...," Les Chants du Crespucule, quoted in Grant, op. cit., p. 179.

⁴
Hugo, "J'aime l'araignée et j'aime l'ortie," Les Contemplations I quoted in Oeuvres Complètes de Victor Hugo, V, p. 295.

Vivez! croissez! semez le grain à l'aventure! ...
 D'aimer sans fin, d'aimer toujours, d'aimer encore,
 Sous la sérénité des sombres astres d'or!
 Faites tressaillir l'air, le flot, l'aile, la bouche,
 O palpitations du grand amour farouche!¹

Musset was noted for his poems on love. His poems, essentially lyrical, described his loves and disappointments. He believed that the all important thing is to love.² Having loved, one suffers, and it was the suffering which reminded him of love. He interwove love and suffering in his poems: "J'aime, et je veux palir; j'aime et je veux souffrir."³ Although suffering accompanied love, Musset expressed his desire for ceaseless loving:

Après avoir souffert, il faut souffrir encore;
 Il faut aimer sans cesse, après avoir aimé.⁴

Alfred de Vigny ignored love as a theme in his works. He was different from his contemporaries and more attention will be paid to his beliefs in the following chapters.

Death, another of the major themes, was interpreted differently by the poets of this school. This theme did not appear frequently in classical poetry; however, it was used in the tragedies as a means of ending the plot, the hero died.⁵

¹ Hugo, "Mugitusque Boum," Les Contemplations II, quoted in Oeuvres Complètes de Victor Hugo, VI, p. 139.

² Clement, op. cit., p. 344.

³ Alfred de Musset, "La Nuit d'aout," Poésies nouvelles, quoted in Grant, op. cit., p. 220.

⁴ Ibid., p. 221.

⁵ Clement, op. cit., p. 346.

The romantic poets, unlike the classical poets, mentioned this theme in their works. To some it was an escape from life, with all its burdens, to a place of solitude; to another, it was a majestic change which should be taken silently and regally, and yet to another it seemed like a dark cavern which was always before mankind.

Lamartine, Vigny and Hugo saw death as a liberator from life's evils. Lamartine, after the death of his love, desired also this eternal solitude:

Sur la terre d'exil pourquoi reste-je encore?
Il n'est rien de commun entre la terre et moi.¹

In describing the death of his love, Lamartine described the change the human body received after death, there was a certain amount of awe and respect in this description:

Et moi, debout, saisi d'une terreur secrète,
Je n'osais m'approcher de ce reste adoré,
Comme si du trepas la majeste muette
L'eût déjà consacré.²

Victor Hugo, although occupied by the thought of death in the early part of his literary career, did not recognize it fully until after the death of his daughter, Leopoldine. He accepted this death very sadly and he turned to God and said:

Je viens à vous, Seigneur! confessant que vous êtes
Bon, clement, indulgent et doux, ô Dieu vivant!
Je conviens que vous seul savez ce que vous faites,
Et que l'homme n'est rien qu'un jonc qui tremble au vent.³

¹ Lamartine, "L'Isolement," Premières méditations poétiques, quoted in Grant, op. cit., p. 30.

² Lamartine, "Le Crucifix," op. cit., p. 38.

³ Hugo, "A Villequier," Les Contemplations II, quoted in Oeuvres Complètes de Victor Hugo, VI, p. 53.

Alfred de Vigny ignored death as a theme. He advocated the acceptance of death as a stoic, remembering that death signified eternal peace.

C'est trop! ...
J'ai donné mon secret, Dalila va le vendre.
... ... ce qui sera, sera!¹

In contrast to Lamartine, Hugo and Vigny, Musset did not welcome death. He hardly mentioned it in his poems. He has written enough, however, for us to see how he reacted to this theme:

L'heure de ma mort, depuis dix-huit mois,
De tous les cotés sonne à mes oreilles. ...
Ma force à lutter s'use et se prodigue.
Jusqu'à mon repos, tout est un combat,
Et, comme un coursier brisé et fatigué,
Mon courage éteint chancelle et s'abat.²

Nature, another of the major themes of the Romantic Movement, appeared in various forms throughout the earlier literary periods. At first, it was discussed in a mythological manner where in nature was anthropomorphized. The Biblical approach to nature was later accepted by the poets. This second concept of nature was equal to pantheism wherein mankind sought God in the worship of nature. The third concept was descriptive. The poets used nature simply as a means of describing a picture, no spiritual element was present in this approach. In the last concept, the poets showed an interpenetration into nature; nature was endowed with a soul and man tried to find spiritual recluse in it;

¹
Alfred de Vigny, "La Colère de Samson," Les Destinées, poemes philosophiques, quoted in Grant, op. cit., p. 108.

²
Musset, "Derniers Vers," Oeuvres Posthumes, cited by George N. Henning, Representative French Lyrics of the Nineteenth Century (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1941), p. 238.

in finding this spiritual solitude, a closer contact with God was attained.¹

Nature, therefore, not being an entirely new theme, was accepted by most of the poets. Since the romantics received most of their inspirations from the past it is not surprising that this theme was treated in three different ways. It appeared as descriptive, interpenetrative and as pantheistic.²

Rousseau was among the first to introduce the theme of interpenetration of nature. In La Nouvelle Héloïse, the nature he described was beautiful. Saint-Preux expressed his profound love to Julie after having enjoyed the beauty and calm that nature furnished. Rousseau also used the descriptive approach in speaking of nature, and these two concepts of nature, interpenetration and descriptive, were later developed by the romantic poets.

Lamartine sought solitude in nature. In his descriptions he placed himself in the midst of the picture thus trying to identify his feelings therein. At times he seemed pantheistic. Sometimes, however, he found nature indifferent towards humanity, as depicted in this quotation:

Mais au sort des humain la nature insensible
Sur leurs débris épars suivra son cours paisible.³

¹
Clement, op. cit., p. 350.

²
Ibid.

³
Lamartine, "Les Préludes à M. Victor Hugo," Secondes méditations poétiques, quoted in Oeuvres de Lamartine, Vol. I (Paris: Imprimerie E. Martinet, 1866), p. 246.

Lamartine obtained consolation from the nature which he sometimes personified in his poems:

Mais la nature est là qui t'invite et qui t'aime.¹

Hugo discussed nature in numerous ways. It sometimes formed the setting for his poems on love, in which case, nature was splendid in her serenity and in such splendor she led humanity to peace and tranquility:

.... la beauté sereine, inépuisable, intime,
Verse à l'âme un oubli sérieux et sublime,
De tout ce que la terre et l'homme ont de mauvais.²

Then, he found nature indifferent towards man. He reacted against this impassibility of nature:

Quoi donc! c'est vainement ici que nous aimâmes!
Rien ne nous restera de ces coteaux fleuris.
Où nous fondions notre être en y mêlant nos flammes!
L'impassible nature a déjà tout repris.³

Although he protested against nature Victor Hugo used the pantheistic concept in some of his poems:

Orages! passions! taisez-vous dans mon âme!
Jamais si près de Dieu mon coeur n'a pénétré.
Le couchant me regarde avec ses yeux de flamme,
La vaste mer me parle, et je me sens sacré.⁴

Musset found nature indifferent to the sufferings of man. He did

¹
Lamartine, "Le Vallon," Premières méditations poétiques, quoted in Grant, op. cit., p. 82.

²
Hugo, "A Mlle Louise B ... Bieve," Feuilles d'automne, quoted in Oeuvres Complètes de Victor Hugo, II, p. 381.

³
Hugo, "Tristesse d'Olympio," Les Rayons et Les Ombres, quoted in Grant, op. cit., p. 188.

⁴
Hugo, "Promenades dans les rochers: Quatrieme Promenade," Les Quatre Vents de l'Esprit, quoted in Henning, op. cit., p. 191.

not treat it as a theme. After his rupture from his love he returned to the scene, but nature remained impassible to his feelings:

Fièvre est cette forêt dans sa beauté tranquille,
Et fier aussi mon coeur.¹

Vigny remained aloof toward nature. To him it was cold and cruel; therefore, he withdrew from it. He described nature in "La Maison du Berger" in the following manner:

Vivez, froide nature, et revivez sans cesse.²

In discussing the theme of nature, some of the poets expressed their beliefs in God. Lamartine, in some of his ecstatic descriptions of nature, praised God for His creation. He discussed in "L'Eternité de la nature, brièveté de l'homme" the close relationship between nature, God and man. Although nature may be permanent, Lamartine was consoled by the belief that God did watch over mankind.

Je meurs! qu'importe? j'ai vécu!
Dieu m'a vu! ...
Et la nature m'a dit Passe;
Ton sort est sublime: il t' a vu! ³

Although Lamartine did at times seem in despair as regards his religion, most of his poems displayed his belief in God. In his poem "Les Laboureurs" he described God as the Father of all:

Homme, femme, enfants leur image, ...
N'est-cepas toi qui nous rappelle

¹
Musset, "Souvenir," Posies nouvelles, quoted in Grant, op. cit., p. 234.

²
Vigny, "La Maison du Berger," Les Destinées, poèmes philosophiques, quoted in Grant, op. cit., p. 102.

³
Lamartine, "Eternité de la nature, brièveté de l'homme," Harmonies poétiques et religieuses, quoted in Oeuvres de Lamartine, p. 180.

Cette parente fraternelle
Des enfants dont le père est Dieu.¹

Hugo, confronted by religious curiosity, tried to prove the existence of God:

Et je me demandai pourquoi l'on est ici, ...
Et pourquoi le Seigneur, qui seul lit à son livre,
Mêle éternellement dans un fatal hymen
Le chant de la nature au cri du genre humain?²

Like Lamartine, he had a pantheistic approach to God, but in many of his works various concepts of God have been treated. He did justify, however, that everything which is endowed with a soul is a part of God who reigns supremely over them.

Arbres, roseaux, rochers, tout vit! Tout est
plein d'âmes.
Mais vous n'êtes pas hors de Dieu complètement;
Dieu, soleil dans l'azur, dans la cendre étincelle,
N'est hors de rien, étant la fin universelle.³

Musset did not treat the theme on God as profoundly as did Lamartine and Hugo. In "Lettre à Lamartine" he mentioned:

Tu respectes le mal fait par la Providence,
Tu le laisses passer et tu crois à ton Dieu. ...
Je ne sais pas son nom, j'ai regardé les cieux,
Je sais qu'ils sont à lui; je sais qu'ils sont immenses,
Et que l'immensité ne peut pas être à deux.⁴

¹
Lamartine, "Les Laboureurs," Jocelyn, quoted in Grant, op. cit., pp. 59-60.

²
Hugo, "Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne," Feuilles d'automne, p. 267.

³
Hugo, "Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre," Les Contemplations II, p. 331.

⁴
Musset, "Lettre à Lamartine," Oeuvres d'Alfred de Musset, Poesies (1833-1852), Vol. II, ed. Alphonse Lemerre, (Paris: _____ n.d.), p. 84.

In the poem "Lettre à Lamartine" Musset did confess that the skies or the universe belonged to God. This was one of his recognitions of in the existence of God. By contrast, however, in "Rolla" he said:

O Christ! je ne suis pas de ceux que la prière
 Dans tes temples muets amène à pas tremblants;
 Je ne suis pas de ceux qui vont à ton Calvaire, ...
 Je ne crois pas, ô Christ! à ta parole sainte: ...
 Ta gloire est morte, ô Christ!¹

Vigny, like the other poets, questioned the existence of God. He did not, however, find God in nature as did Lamartine and Hugo. Vigny found God, but there were faults in the God he saw; He was cruel, He was unjust and He was silent to the pleas of anguish of mankind.²

Each poet reacted differently to most of the themes of the Romantic Movement. Alfred de Vigny, sometimes called the philosopher of the romantics, differed to some degree to the other major romantic poets. In the remaining chapters analyses will be made of five of his poems to determine the philosophical position in the Romantic Movement.

¹
 Musset, "Rolla," Poésies nouvelles, quoted in Henning, op. cit., p. 199.

²
 Clement, op. cit., p. 330.

CHAPTER III

THE FUNCTION OF A POET

The literary production of any author is greatly influenced by various incidents in his life. Many of the romantic poets chose to express these events, whether happy or unhappy, in their writings. Alfred de Vigny, although decidedly burdened by numerous disappointments, did not publicize his personal sentiments as freely as did many of the other romantic poets. It is not to be believed, however, that he was not lyrical, because in reality, he was. In order to appreciate the philosophy which appeared in his poems, some of the major disappointments of his life must be mentioned.

Alfred de Vigny, in his early childhood, was forced to attend a school which was inferior to his aristocratic origin, because his parents could not afford for him the very best. He was adversely criticized by his class-mates because of the "de" (a sign of aristocracy) which appeared before his name. In addition to this, he was mentally superior to his colleagues.¹ This type of frustration influenced his philosophy, especially with regards to his opinion on the solitude of a genius.

Vigny, following in his father's footsteps, entered the army after three years of study at the Polytechnic School. He served in the

¹ Arnold Whitridge, Alfred de Vigny (New York: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 11-13.

Maison du Roi which was an aristocratic corps of the French army. Later, after the abolishment of the Maison du Roi, Lieutenant Alfred de Vigny was assigned to the Fifth regiment of the Gaurd. Here, he found army life extremely monotonous and dull. The conversations of the young officers were distasteful to him because they found pleasure in discussing the minutiae of their uniforms and in boasting of their lives of debauchery.

In 1822 Vigny was made captain of the Fifty-fifth regiment, and he had expected some actions of bravery because the Congress of Verona had ordered an invasion of Spain.¹ Unfortunately his troop was not chosen. This was another of his disappointments. His father had spoken so highly of military life, and of all the glories that he, Leon de Vigny, had won, yet Alfred de Vigny experienced only boredom.

Since Vigny was not sufficiently challenged in the army, he sought interest elsewhere. During his leisure time he read Le Génie du Christianisme, Byron, and the Bible.² He also became deeply attached to a semi-literary group which met at Jacques Deschamps' home, and it was through these meetings that he met most of the early romantic poets.³

In addition to visiting Jacques Deschamps, Vigny frequented the "Salon de Paris," and it was there that he met Delphine Gay. They fell in love, and for the first time in his life, Alfred de Vigny experienced

¹ Pierre-Georges Castex, Alfred de Vigny (Paris: Hatier, 1957), p. 17.

² Ibid., p. 18.

³ Ibid.

happiness. Mme de Vigny, his mother, did not approve of this relationship, and discouraged Vigny against the continuation of this romance. Vigny, being respectful of his mother's wishes, gave up his happiness and accepted once more, a life of boredom.

In 1825, Vigny married Lydia Bunbury, a wealthy English lady. This marriage was to become another source of disillusionment for him. His fair English bride became extremely ill shortly after their wedding. Later he learned that she was barren. This indeed was a great disappointment to one so proud of his name and family. Lydia was of little company to her husband because of her illness, her mediocre intelligence and her difficulty in adapting herself to the French customs.¹ The poet, therefore, did not find happiness, which he so earnestly sought, in his marriage.

Four years after his marriage, Vigny, still seeking happiness, became intimately involved with Marie Dorval, an actress. It was for her that he created the role of Kitty Bell in Chatterton. Marie Dorval, however, not realizing the true meaning of faithfulness, deceived Vigny by her promiscuous love affairs with other men. Again this happiness which he so desperately sought eluded him.

As if fate were not content with her injustices to Vigny, he faced another disappointment; his mother became incurably ill. These were difficult years for the poet. Marie Dorval could not understand his respectful adoration for her and forsook him, his wife was too ill to be of much company, and his mother was insane.² Vigny had seen his father

¹ Ibid., p. 21.

² Ibid., p. 199.

bear the problems of life bravely, and he, Alfred de Vigny, had to face his problems courageously, perhaps with the same retiring stoicism as his father had done before him.¹

These various experiences made a lasting impression on Alfred de Vigny, thus forming the foundation of his philosophy of pessimism and stoicism which was expressed in his poems. Unlike the other romantic poets, he disguised his feelings by the use of symbols because the display of one's personal life and feelings to the public was not attractive to him. Although Vigny did not share some of the opinions of the other romantic poets, their expressions of melancholy, of loneliness, and of solitude, seem to serve as a definite link between them. This type of melancholia is evident in their descriptions of the position of the poet in society.

N. H. Clement has shown how this theme, the function of the poet in a society, was treated in the past. It is amazing to note how it had survived its original connotation. He wrote:

Antiquity had accorded to the poet the lofty position: among the Greeks Orpheus and Amphion were sons of gods or kings and builders of cities and Homer was accorded a special cult; among the Jews God directly inspired Moses and the prophets, and kings like David and Solomon. Everywhere poets were regarded as civilizers and lawgivers.²

The romantic poets portrayed this ancient theme in their poems.

Victor Hugo, in his poem, "Fonction du poete," mentioned that the poet was one chosen by God.

¹
Ibid., p. 19.

²
N. H. Clement, op. cit., p. 382.

Dieu le veut, dans le temps contraires,
Chacun travaille, et chacun sert.¹

Since the poet was chosen by God he should be a leader:

Le poète en des jours impies
Vient préparer des jours meilleurs.
Il est l'homme des utopies, ...
Il voit, quand les peuples végètent!²

The people should heed the words of the poet:

Peuples! écoutez le poète!
Écoutez le rêveur sacré!³

Lamartine, too, saw the poet as a leader. In Des destinées de la poésie he mentioned the mission of poetry.

Elle ne sera plus lyrique dans le sens où nous
prenons ce mot ... La poésie sera de la raison
chantée, voilà sa destinée pour longtemps; elle
sera philosophique, religieuse, politique, sociale,
comme les époques que le genre humain va accomplir. ...
Elle va se faire peuple, et devenir populaire comme
la religion, la raison, et la philosophie.⁴

Musset discussed the function of the poet in his poem "La Nuit du Mai." He described the suffering of a pelican which symbolized the poet and his duty to mankind. Like the other romantic poets, he believed that the poet was a leader, but the poet must suffer in order to be better qualified for this exalted position.

1

Hugo, "Fonction du poète," Les Rayons et Les Ombres, quoted in Lagarde and Michard, op. cit., p. 162.

2

Ibid., p. 162.

3

Ibid., p. 162.

4

Lamartine, "Des destinées de la poésie," quoted in Lagarde and Michard, op. cit., p. 107.

...j'ai souffert un dur martyre,
 Et le moins que j'en pourrais dire,
 Si je l'essayais sur ma lyre,¹
 La briserait comme un roseau.¹

In the poem, "Moïse,"² Vigny describes the life of the Biblical character, Moses. The leader, Moses is tired of the sufferings and loneliness which are attached to his work, and in a long discourse before God he relates the tasks which he has performed for the benefit of the children of Israel. Finally, God grants him his wish, he dies, and is buried, and a new leader is chosen. The poem is beautifully written, and Vigny adds majestic splendor to this metrical composition by his adequately chosen words.

Vigny uses the Bible as the source of this poem. It is divided into three sections. In the first Vigny describes the setting and mood of the poem, in the second the various deeds of Moses are mentioned, and lastly the death of Moses is described.

In the first section, lines one through 46, Vigny, in a very magnificent and symbolic manner describes the scene. It is evening and the sun is slowly sinking into the far horizon. The sinking sun symbolizes the approaching death of Moses. Like the sun, he has brought light to the children of Israel, and like the sun, his end is near. In the description of the setting sun Vigny uses some exceptionally vivid colors which could symbolize the grandeur of Moses' position:

¹
 Musset, "La Nuit de Mai," Poésies nouvelles, quoted in Grant, op. cit., p. 207.

²
 This poem was written in 1822 and published in 1826. It appeared in Poèmes Antiques et Modernes.

Le soleil prolongeait sur la cime des tentes
 Ces obliques rayons, ces flammes éclatantes,
 Ces larges traces d'or qu'il laisse dans les airs,
 Lorsqu'en un lit de sable il se couche aux deserts
 La pourpre et l'or semblaient revêtir la campagne.¹

Having adequately prepared the mood of the poem, Vigny introduces the hero in line 7: "Moïse, homme du Dieu, s'arrête, et, sans orgueil," The divinity of Moses was mentioned opportunely so that the reader would recognize the importance of Moses. The frequent use of the commas suggests Moses' slow gait as he climbed the mountain. The line which follows, "Sur le vaste horizon promeneun long coup d'oeil" serves as a transition to the rest of the stanza. Vigny delineates all that Moses sees around him. Here again, Vigny's use of colors is symbolic. Moses sees fig-trees, palm trees, valleys of verdant beauty and then he sees the promised land which he cannot enter. All these colors symbolize life, a life which Moses will not enjoy.

Vigny now turns our attention to the children of Israel who appear like stalks of wheat, lines 27 and 28:

Les enfants d'Israel s'agitaient au vallon
 Comme les blés qu'agite l'aquilon.

Because of Moses' elevation the Israelites seem minute, Vigny places their leader in such an outstanding position so that all eyes will be focused upon him.

"Le Prophète centenaire," Moses, now at the top of the mountain awaits God's inspiration. He has to leave the crowd and go to God alone because he is the chosen one: "Moïse était parti pour trouver le

¹
 Vigny, "Moïse," *Poèmes antiques et modernes*, quoted in Grant, *op. cit.*, p. 82. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations will be taken from this volume.

Seigneur." Then in a solemn chant Moses complains to God.

Lines 47 through 106 comprise the second section of this poem. Moses, although chosen by God, is not happy, line 98: "J'ai marché devant tous, triste et seul dans ma gloire," he is tired and sad and now he wants to be freed from his duty. In a sad refrain he says the following after each complaint:

Je vivrai donc toujours puissant et solitaire?
Laissez-moi m'endormir du sommeil de la terre.
.....
Hélas! je suis Seigneur, puissant et solitaire,
Laissez-moi m'endormir du sommeil de la terre.
.....
Vous m'avez fait vieillir puissant et solitaire,
Laissez-moi m'endormir du sommeil de la terre.
.....
O Seigneur! j'ai vécu puissant et solitaire,
Laissez-moi m'endormir du sommeil de la terre.

These repetitions emphasize Moses' feelings. He is powerful yet lonely, and now he wants an eternal rest.

The third section mentions the disappearance of Moses. Like the Biblical story, his burial remains a mystery. In line 113 Vigny mentions the fact that Moses is not on the mountain, presumably he is dead:

"Bientôt le haut du mont reparut sans Moïse." Since the work of the leader must continue Joshua is chosen: "Josué s'avancait pensif et palissant, Car il était déjà l'élus du Tout-Puissant."

This poem is one of the most magnificent works of Alfred de Vigny. As has already been stated, he used the Bible as the chief source of reference for this work. Sections one and three are based on the Biblical story found in the book of Deuteronomy.¹ In the second section Vigny

¹

Cf. Deu. XXXIV, 1-3, 6.

selects various episodes of Moses' life. He chooses symbols to express his various convictions and this poem symbolizes the genius of a poet.

Vigny, in one of his letters wrote this in reference to this poem and its significance:

... Ce grand nom ne sert que de masque à un homme de tous les siècles et plus moderne qu'antique: l'homme de génie las de son éternel veuvage et désespéré de voir sa solitude plus vaste et plus aride à mesure qu'il grandit. Fatigué de sa grandeur, il demande le néant.¹

Moses, therefore, symbolizes the man chosen to lead, the man of genius. He is lonely because no one understands him. Tired of life and all its disappointments, Moses seeks a 'néant,' a type of eternal solitude.

Although Vigny made an effort to disguise his feelings by the use of symbols this poem portrays his philosophy. He, like Moses, is tired of the burdens and disappointments of life. Like the other romantic poets, he thinks that he is a genius who is always misunderstood by people. We may assume that his early childhood and military experiences contributed to these aspects of his philosophy.

As was noted in this chapter, Vigny's life was a recurrence of various unfortunate incidents. Like Moses, he was generally misunderstood, and he too, needed a 'néant.' In chapter four an analysis of two poems by Alfred de Vigny, "La Maison du Berger" and "La Colère de Samson" will be made indicating whether Vigny found his solitude and happiness in a woman.

¹
Vigny, Correspondance, quoted in Lagarde and Michard, op. cit., p. 125.

CHAPTER IV

THE PHILOSOPHY OF ALFRED de VIGNY REVEALED IN:

"La Maison du Berger" and "La Colère de Samson"

Alfred de Vigny, in the poem, "La Maison du Berger,"¹ invites his ideal woman, Eva, to flee this burdened life with him in a shepherd's hut, and there enjoy the solitude which it affords. Many critics have tried to identify Eva, but to no avail. It has been suggested that Eva symbolizes an ideal woman to whom Vigny addresses this magnificent poem. Vigny combines three major themes, reveries versus science, poetry versus politics and love versus nature, in the composition of this poem.

Since there are three separate sections it is necessary to discuss each part individually. In the first section, reveries versus science, Vigny reminds Eva of all the cares of the world. His repetition of the sound "s" illustrates his intense dislike for the afflictions in life, lines 1 - 7:

Si ton coeur gémissant du poids de notre vie,
Se traîne et se débat comme un aigle blessé,
Pourtant comme le mien, sur son aile asservie,
Tout un monde fatal, écrasant et glacé!
S'il ne bat qu'en saignant par sa plaie immortelle,
S'il ne voit plus l'amour, son étoile fidèle,
Eclairer pour lui seul l'horizon effacé;

¹ Alfred de Vigny, "La Maison du Berger," op. cit., p. 92. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations will be taken from this volume.

In lines 1 - 21, the word "si" appears frequently, it is used as a part of a long conditional sentence designed to build the interest up to a climax. The result clause, which appears in line 22, may be considered as a sort of "dénouement" of the idea presented.

Vigny, in the first three stanzas of this poem, reminds Eva of the numerous misfortunes of life, then he concludes his discourse by inviting Eva to flee this life. Lines 22 - 25 are antithetical to lines 26 - 28. Vigny mentions the cities and their corruption in contrast to spacious woods and their freedom. In lines 29 - 42, Vigny creates a tableau of nature. He personifies some of the inanimate objects: "Le crespucule ami," "les timides joncs," "le bois rêveur," "les grappes sauvages." Then, in the following stanza he invites Eva again to flee this burdened life. "Viens y cacher l'amour et ta divine faute;"

In lines 50 - 56, Vigny introduces "La Maison du Berger," which is a hut used by shepherds. Chateaubriand mentioned this symbol earlier, and it is believed that Vigny was influenced by him:

Je n'ai jamais aperçu au coin d'un bois la hutte roulante
d'un berger sans songer qu'elle me suffrait avec toi ...
Nous promèrerions aujourd'hui notre cabane de solitude en
solitude, et notre demeure ne tiendrait pas plus à la
terre que notre vie.¹

The description given by Vigny of the shepherd's hut, lines 50 - 56, is puzzling. This intricate portrayal adds to his reveries. The "Maison du Berger," which symbolizes a recluse from life would help them to forget their troubled spirits. Vigny expresses his desire to travel to

1

Chateaubriand, *Martyrs*, livre X, quoted in Alfred de Vigny, *Morceaux choisis*, ed. René Canat (Paris: H. Didier, 1930), p. 512.

distant lands; it did not matter where as long as he and Eva are in their hut:

Nous suivrons du hasard la course vagabonde.
Que m'importe le jour que m'importe le monde?
Je dirai qu'ils sont beaux quand tes yeux l'auront dit.

In lines 64 - 105, Vigny discusses civilization as symbolized by the railroad. He remembers the wreck at Versailles in 1842; therefore, he disputes the readiness of humanity for such inventions. These stanzas, concerning civilization, have bewildered many critics. René Canat, in his analysis of this poem, wrote the following:

Il est inutile d'en rien citer, sauf les trois vers de la fin qui montrent combien le souvenir de sa mère était profond dans son coeur. Il faut, dit-il, éviter les chemins de fer:

'A moins qu'au lit de mort une mère éplorée
Ne veille encor poser sur sa race adorée
Ces yeux tristes et doux qu'on ne doit plus revoir.'¹

In lines 106 - 126, Alfred de Vigny makes a contrast between the newly invented railway system and the old means of transportation. He does not yet accept the speed with which the train travels, and in line 109 he exaggerates it. "Que va de l'arc au but en faisant siffler l'air."

The following stanza, lines 11 - 119, is antithetical to the previously mentioned stanza. Here, Vigny describes the old means of transportation:

On n'entendra jamais piaffer sur une route
Le pied vif du cheval sur les pavés en feu

In lines 115, Vigny looks back sorrowfully upon that past time and he bids it farewell: "Adieu, voyages lents, bruits lointains qu'on écoute."

¹

Ibid., p.513.

Lines 116 - 119 furnish an enumeration of the past pleasure experienced during the usage of the now antiquated mode of travel. He, Vigny, mentions "le rire du passant," "un ami rencontré," and "les heures oubliées."

Vigny continues this lamentation on the scientific progress of his period in the following stanza, lines 120 - 126. Then, in the final stanza of the first section, he reminds man of the means of evading life with its burdens, and its inventions if he, man, would accept "la Rêverie:"

Jamais la Rêverie amoureuse et paisible
N'y verra sans horreur son pied blanc attaché.

Vigny personifies 'la Rêverie;' therefore, it has the appearance of a woman. Perhaps he is thinking of Eva when he writes: "son pied blanc," and "le col penché."

Alfred de Vigny, in his composition of the first section of this poem, seems to be inviting Eva, the ideal woman, to a life of freedom and happiness, symbolized by "La Maison du Berger," the shepherd's hut. Then, to oppose what has been previously established, Vigny mentions the newly invented railway system and its destruction of many lives. The examples in this section are primarily antithetical to each other. This particular literary technique prevails throughout the poem, and can be observed in the second section as Vigny treats the theme, poetry versus politics.

In this second section, lines 134 - 224, the poet elaborates upon poetry and its dignity as opposed to politics and its ignominy. He also refers to the theme, the function of the poet, already discussed in Chapter II. Poetry appears to him as a rare pearl, lines 134 - 137:

Poésie! ô trésor! perle de la pensée!

Les tumultes du coeur, comme ceux de la mer,
 Ne sauraient empêcher ta robe nuancée
 D'amasser les couleurs qui doivent te former.

Vigny introduces another thought in lines 138 - 140, he sees poetry crushed shortly after its glorious triumph:

Mais, sitôt qu'il te voit briller sur un front mâle,
 Troublé de ta lueur mystérieuse et pâle,
 Le vulgaire effrayé commence à blasphémer.

This particular thought appears very often in the works of Alfred de Vigny. In the poem, "Moïse," he writes:

Sitôt que votre souffle a rempli le berger,
 Les hommes se sont dit: 'Il nous est étranger,'¹

Then, in Stello, Vigny writes: "Le serpent était écaisé, mais il avait dévoré le cygne de la France."² The same idea appears also in

Chatterton:

... j'ai écrit, comme le roi Harold au duc Guillaume, en vers à demi saxons et francs; et ensuite, cette Muse du dixième siècle, ... Ils l'auraient brisée s'ils avaient crue faite de ma main.³

Vigny emphasizes in all these quotations the fact that the work of the artist is destroyed because many do not understand it.

In the following stanza of "La Maison du Berger," Vigny continues to discuss the misunderstood poet:

Le pur enthousiasme est craint des faibles âmes
 Qui ne sauraient porter son ardeur ni son poids.
 Pourquoi le fuir?

¹
 Vigny, "Moïse," op. cit., p. 85.

²
 Vigny, Stello, quoted in Alfred de Vigny, Oeuvres Complètes, F. Baldensperger (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1950), p. 786.

³
 Vigny, Chatterton, ed., Baldensperger, Ibid., p. 840.

His reference to "le pur enthousiasme" alludes to the inspirations which poets receive, as listed in line 145: "C'est le Soleil du ciel, c'est L'Amour, c'est la Vie."

Vigny, after having spoken favorably of poetry, focuses his attention upon its decadence. He criticizes the poets and declares that they have caused poetry to lose its dignity. This concept is portrayed in lines 148 - 154:

Le Muse a mérité les insolents sourires
Et les soupçons moqueurs qu'éveille son aspect.
Des que son oeil chercha le regard des Satyres,
Sa parole tremble, son serment fut suspect,
Il lui fut interdit d'enseigner la sagesse
Au passant lui donna sans crainte et sans respect.

Vigny, in lines 162 - 168, discusses the various ways in which poetry was used in the past. He mentions its appearance in the Fifth Century, B.C. alluding to Anacreon, a Greek poet of that Century, by his use of the word, "un vieillard," line 163. Vigny refers also to the banquets of Horace when poetry was sung. Then, he cites a more recent occasion when he speaks of Voltaire and his poetry.

In the following two stanzas, lines 169 - 182, Vigny ridicules the poets who have forsaken poetry for politics. He is reflecting upon the actions of his contemporaries, Hugo and Lamartine. Vigny made note of this political career of Lamartine in his, Vigny's, Journal:

Il est déplorable qu'un poète comme Lamartine,
s'il s'avise d'être député, soit forcé de s'occuper
des bureaux de tabac que demandent des commettants.
Il devrait y avoir des députés abstraits, députés de
la France, et d'autre, députés des Français.¹

¹

Vigny, Journal d'un poète, quoted in Grant, op. cit., p. 104.

In contrast to the role of the poet, according to Vigny, the role of the politician appears to be empty and unfruitful. He elaborates upon this theme in lines 183 - 194. In line 190, he mentions that even the peasants look unapprovingly at the political career accepted by the poets:

L'ombrageux paysan gronde à voir qu'on dételle,
Et que pour le scrutin on quitte le labour.

It must be remembered that Vigny had previously referred to "des faibles âmes," in lines 141, in speaking of the people who did not understand the role of the poet. It does seem that his allusion here, to "l'ombrageux paysan" and their disapproval of politics, emphasizes Vigny's belief in the superiority of poetry. To further emphasize his idea, Vigny returns to the eulogy of the Muse, line 196: "O toi des vrais penseurs impérissable amour!" This final exclamation to the Muse, "O toi ----- amour!" seems like the decisive belief of Alfred de Vigny; although the other poets have been unfaithful to poetry, he, Vigny, will always remain a poet.

In the following two stanzas Vigny writes of the solidarity of thoughts which are placed in poetry, the priceless diamond, as he now alludes to poetry. As this diamond glistens, its sparkles will be a guide to mankind, lines 204 - 205:

Diamant sans rival, que tes feux illuminent
Les pas lents et tardifs de l'humaine Raison!

It is interesting to note that the same idea was expressed by Vigny in Stello:

Regardez cette lumière s'éteindre, et veillez;
heureux si vos veilles peuvent aider l'humanité
à se grouper et s'unir autour d'une clarté plus pure!¹

¹Vigny, Chatterton, ed. Baldensperger, op. cit., p. 803.

The mention of the diamond which symbolizes true poetry reminds Vigny of his reverie "La Maison du Berger." He, therefore, refers to it in lines 206 and 207.

Il faut, pour voir de loin les peuples qui cheminent,
Que le Berger t'enchâsse au toit de sa Maison.

The remaining lines of this stanza are somewhat obscure. It appears as if Vigny is describing dawn, but this particular portrayal does not coincide with the ideas previously mentioned, the diamond and the shepherd's hut. Since the diamond represents true poetry and the idea of true poetry evokes reveries, symbolized in this poem by the shepherd's hut, can it be that Vigny is referring to the dawn of true poetry?

The following stanza, lines 211 - 217, seems to elaborate the idea that Vigny foresees the dawn of true poetry. It may be assumed, therefore, that Vigny, in lines 208 - 210, is describing the dawn of true poetry, and this stanza has been added to substantiate his idea:

Les peuples tout enfants à pein se decouvrent
Par-dessus les buissons nés pendant leur sommeil,
Et leur main, à travers les ronces qu'ils entr'ouvrent,
Met aux coups mutuels le premier appareil.

People, however, are still influenced by their old barbarious actions, lines 215: "La barbarie encor tient nos pieds dans sa gaine."

The final stanza of this section reveals hope for mankind. It is antithetical to the previous stanza because of the speed of movement that Vigny foresees in contrast to the lethargy previously stated.

Although this section seems unrelated to the general theme of the poem, it is not. In studying this particular section it is necessary to remember the poet's objective in composing this poem. His topic, "La Maison du Berger" symbolizes a type of flight from real life. In the

first section, the shepherd's hut evokes a carefree life, in the second it is poetry, and in the third it is love. These three factors are important to the establishment of Vigny's happiness as much as are the three requisites for true poetry previously mentioned in line 145:

"C'est le Soleil du ciel, c'est l'Amour, c'est la Vie."

In the previous sections, Vigny mentions two of the three pre-requisites for his happiness. In the third section, therefore, we shall see how he treats the third factor, love. It must be remembered, however, that he makes constant use of antithesis throughout this poem; therefore, in discussing love, he reveals the warmth in a woman's love as opposed to the coldness and indifference of nature.

Since the third section, lines 225 - 336, is devoted to a discussion of love, Vigny returns to his ideal woman, Eva. In the first two stanzas, he discusses the role of the woman as revealed in the Bible. Vigny usually uses Biblical examples to confirm his ideas as done in this poem.

He questions Eva of her knowledge as regards her duty, in lines 225 - 226:

Eva, qui donc es-tu? Sais-tu bien ta nature?
Sais-tu quel est ici ton but et ton devoir?

Vigny, having aroused the curiosity of Eva by the questions which he poses in lines 225 and 226, proceeds to state the punishment pronounced upon man at his Creation, lines 227 - 231:

Sais-tu que, pour punir l'homme, sa créature,
D'avoir porté la main sur l'arbre du savoir,
Dieu permit qu'avant tout, de l'amour de soi-même
En tout temps, à tout âge, il fût son bien suprême,
Tourmenté de s'aimer, tourmenté de se voir?

In the following stanza, lines 232 - 238, however, Vigny states

the role of the woman:

Mais si Dieu près de lui t'a voulu mettre, ô femme!
Compagne délicate! Eva! sais-tu pourquoi?
C'est pour qu'il se regard au miroir d'une autre âme,
Qu'il entende ce chant qui ne vient que de toi:

It would appear from the lines quoted, that Vigny is expressing his personal opinion concerning the duty of a woman. According to him, she is placed on earth to console and help man in his various endeavors. It may be deduced that Vigny entertains the idea that woman is created intellectually inferior to man. In lines 227 and 228, Vigny speaks of man and of his endowment of intellectual curiosity:

... pour punir l'homme, sa créature,
D'avoir porté la main sur l'arbre du savoir

Vigny speaks of man and of his endowment of intellectual curiosity.

By contrast, when he speaks to Eva, the ideal woman, he completely ignores her reasoning faculties, and sees in her only a source of consolation and inspiration:

L'enthousiasme pur dans une voix suave.
C'est afin que tu sois son juge et son esclave
Et règues sur sa vie en vivant son sa loi.

In the following three stanzas one finds a further development of the first two stanzas of this section. Vigny emphasizes the fact, in these three stanzas that woman is created intellectually inferior, but supernaturally superior.

He mentions her love which is as strong as death in lines 241 - 242:

Que les rois d'Orient ont dit dans leurs cantiques
Ton regard redoutable a l'égard de la mort;

Then, in the following line, he speaks of her feminine intuition: "Chacun cherche à fléchir tes jugements rapides ..." Vigny now returns to his

original concept, that of her intellectual inferiority. Here, he claims that she is capable of good thoughts, but she needs to be guided, presumably by man:

Ta pensée a des bonds comme ceux des gazelles,
Mais ne saurait marcher sans guide et sans appui.

In the following stanza, lines 253 - 259, he discusses the consolation and strength man receives from her:

Tes paroles de feu meuvent les multitudes,
Tes pleurs lavent l'injure et les ingrattitudes,
Tu pousses par le bras l'homme. ... Il se lève armé.

Vigny summarizes all that has been previously stated in the following stanza, lines 260 - 266:

C'est à toi qu'il convient d'ouïr les grandes plaintes
Que l'humanité triste exhale sourdement.

Woman in the performance of her duty is described as the Muse of pity.

Vigny, having adequately enumerated the characteristics of his ideal woman, now makes a contrast between the understanding attitude of woman and the indifference of nature. First, he invites Eva to see the world with him during which he reveals that her beauty and actions surpass nature and its splendor. He writes in lines 262-268; 271-274:

Viens donc! le ciel pour moi n'est plus qu'une aréole
Qui t'entoure d'azur, t'eclaire et te défend; ...
Et la fleur ne parfume et l'oiseau ne soupire
Que pour mieux enchanter l'air que ton sein respire;
La terre est le tapis de tes beaux pieds d'enfant.

Then, in lines 279 and 280, he expresses his fear of being left alone with nature which does not understand the needs of man:

Ne me laisse jamais seul avec la Nature;
Car je la connais trop pour n'en pas avoir peur.

The idea, expressed in lines 279 and 280 serves as a transition to the following three stanzas in which nature is personified and is

made to describe her coldness and her indifference to humanity. In lines 281 and 282, and 285 - 287, nature is depicted as an impassive theatre in which humanity appears as actors participating in their own comedy, life:

Je suis l'impassible théâtre
 Que ne peut remuer le pied de ses acteurs; ...
 Je n'entends ni vos cris ni vos soupirs; à peine
 Je sens passer sur moi la comédie humaine
 Qui cherche en vain au ciel ses muets spectateurs.

Nature appears as a supercilious person who looks with contempt upon humanity, lines 288 - 291:

Je roule avec dédain, sans voir et sans entendre,
 A côté des fourmis les populations;
 Je ne distingue pas leur terrier de leur cendre,
 J'ignore en les pourtant les noms des nations.

Nature disagrees with the previous assumption that she is the mother of mankind: "On me dit une mère, et je suis une tombe." Lamartine, who stated in his poem, "Les Laboureurs," that the earth was the mother of man, may have been the source or model for Vigny, who alludes to Lamartine's concept of nature, and for contrast, he cites his own severe interpretation of nature. In the following stanza, the permanence of nature is discussed:

Avant vous, j'étais belle et toujours parfumée, ...
 Après vous, traversant l'espace où tout s'élance,
 J'irai seule et sereine, en un chaste silence
 Je fendrai l'air du front et de mes seins altiers.

Vigny expresses his intense dislike for nature in lines 300 - 308. He concludes the stanza by stating that love for humanity is more fruitful than love for nature:

Ailleurs tous vos regards, ailleurs toutes vos larmes,
 Aimez ce que jamais on ne verra deux fois.

This statement "Ailleurs tous ---- deux fois" serves as a transition to

the other stanza in which Vigny again speaks to his ideal woman:

Oh! qui verra deux fois ta grâce et ta tendresse,
Ange doux et plaintif qui parle en soupirant?

Remembering his love for her, he writes:

Qui naîtra comme toi portant une caresse ...
Dans ta taille indolente et mollement couchée
Et dans ton pur sourire amoureux et souffrant?

Vigny again focuses his attention upon nature as he states in line

316: "Vivez, froide Nature, et revivez sans cesse," and he concludes with dignity and pride:

J'aime la majesté des souffrances humaines,
Vous ne recevrez pas un cri d'amour de moi.

These lines reveal the stoic attitude of Vigny and will be discussed in detail in the following chapter. The last line of the stanza, "Vous ne recevrez --- moi," seems like a final farewell to nature because no more does Vigny mention her in this poem.

Since Vigny does not find any solace in nature, he returns to Eva. He again summons her to come and share with him the reveries in the shepherd's hut. The last two stanzas of the poem convey an idea of freedom as Vigny and Eva enjoy the nomadic life that "La Maison du Berger" offers.

"La Maison du Berger" has been included among the great poems of Alfred de Vigny and justly so because of its unique composition and because it contains a synthesis of all of his philosophical ideas. Vigny, in this poem, expresses his ideas on love, nature, poetry and solitude. All of these themes have been treated by the other romantic poets, but the combination of all four themes adds to the depth of this unmatched composition by Vigny. In the third and final section of this poem, he

differed greatly from the other romantic poets in his interpretation of the theme of nature. He considers nature as an impassive object, and by contrast he expresses the desire to be left alone with the ideal woman, Eva, instead of being with nature. Most of the other romantic poets combined their love with nature, but Vigny does not consider them as being integral in any manner. In this poem, as he proclaims his dislike for nature, Vigny exalts the status of womanhood. This high position, however, is withdrawn from her as he describes the perfidity of women in "La Colère de Samson."

By contrast, Vigny, in the poem, "La Colère de Samson,"¹ does not appear as optimistic as he appears in "La Maison du Berger." In "La Maison du Berger," he foresees the possibility of finding hope and solitude in his ideal woman, Eva, but in "La Colère de Samson," he sees only the deceit and evil in woman, as revealed Delilah. In his description of the treachery of Delilah, Vigny reveals another aspect of his philosophy on women in the composition of "La Colère de Samson." Much has been written concerning the woman he describes in this poem. René Canat, for example, mentioned that it was inspired by his unfortunate love affair with Marie Dorval.² Arnold Whitridge, while discussing the final rupture between Marie Dorval and Vigny, expressed this opinion:

...that would explain the intensity of his loathing for the whole sex which finds expression in "La Colère de Samson," one of the greatest poems he ever wrote but a poem that is curiously foreign to his nature. Here he lifts the veil for a moment and allows us a glimpse of a tortured soul in the

¹
Vigny, "La Colère de Samson," op. cit., p. 195. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations will be taken from this volume.

²
Canat, op. cit., p. 549.

nethermost pit of despair.¹

The poem was written in 1839 after the final break between Vigny and Marie Dorval, but it was never published until January 15, 1864, when it appeared in the Revue des Deux Mondes.² The theme is similar to that of the Biblical story, "Samson and Delilah," and Vigny expresses his opinions through the words given to Samson. In this poem Vigny appears lyrical, but his lyricism is disguised by the use of symbols which he frequently employs.

As is customary with Alfred de Vigny, the action takes place in the night. The desert was silent except for the Hebraic words which fell slowly from the lips of Samson. In his lap reclined his slave, as Vigny called Delilah, who was being lulled to sleep by Samson's chant. Samson, realizing the betrayal of Delilah, reflects upon the treachery of women, then in a heroic manner he terminates his chant: "Ce qui sera, sera!" Since he has already disclosed the secret of his strength to Delilah who betrays him, Samson becomes a prisoner of his enemies, the Philistines. His eyes are burned out and he is placed before their god, Dagon. Delilah as a reward receives a respectable position in the society of the Philistines but her satisfaction is not fully attained because Samson cannot visualize her new gained power. During this period Samson was regaining his strength, and finally he kills his three million enemies. The poem ends with a personal cry from Vigny:

Terre et ciel! punissez par de telles justice
La trahison ourdie en des amours factices,

¹ Whitridge, op. cit., p. 127.

² Grant, op. cit., p. 105.

Et la délation du secret de nos coeurs
 Arraché dans nos bras par des baisers menteurs!

As was noticed in the brief résumé Vigny modified various sections of the story. This will be further discussed in its analysis.

There are three sections in this poem. The first section describes the landscape, Delilah and Samson. The second contains Samson's chant on the treacherous nature of women, and the third describes the capture of Samson, his imprisonment, and finally his triumph.

The first ten lines serve as an introduction to the poem. In the first line, "Le désert est muet, la tente est solitaire" the meaning is two-fold because it describes the scene as well as the mood of the poem. In the following line, Vigny suggests that the hero of this poem is strong and courageous enough to brave lions:

Quel pasteur courageux la dressa sur la terre
 Du sable et des lions?

Then, Vigny returns to the description of the scene in lines three and four.

La nuit n'a pas calmé
 La fournaise du jour dont l'air est enflammé.

The night is not calm. Can this unpeaceful night signify Samson's wrath intensified by Delilah's constant deceit and unfaithfulness?

Vigny continues with his description of the landscape, and then in lines 9 and 10 he transfers his attention again to Samson and Delilah.

Des voyageurs voilés intérieure étoile,
 Et jette longuement deux ombres sur la toile.

The account of the two shadows appears so real that one is convinced that Vigny was describing a picture he had seen. Edmond Estève, in criticizing this poem, wrote:

Vigny a vu à Londres, en 1839, chez Lady Blessington, un tableau de Mantegna, "Samson and Delilah," qui depuis est entré à la National Gallery (n 1145).¹

Since the Bible does not furnish a physical description of Samson and Delilah, it may be assumed that Vigny was also influenced by Mantegna's painting.

Line 12 represents one of the modifications that Vigny made in composing this poem. "C'est Dalila, l'esclave, et ses bras sont liés." The Biblical quotation is as follows: "...he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah."²

Lines 15 - 26 furnish a detailed description of Delilah. The verbal tableau which is painted describes a temptress. Vigny enumerates all the enticing emblems of her feminine form: "ses cheveux dénoués," "ses grands yeux," "ses bras fins," "ses pieds voluptueux," "ses flancs," and "ses deux seins."

By contrast, the description of Samson is stately. Vigny, in his first mention of Samson, writes in line 11: "L'une est grande et superbe." Later, in lines 26 - 27, Vigny compares Samson's knees to those of Anubis, an Egyptian god:

Les genoux de Samson fortement sont unis
Comme les deux genoux du colosse Anubis.

The description of Samson, however, is not as detailed as that of Delilah.

Lines 31 and 32 serve as a transition to the second section:

Lui, murmure le chant funèbre et douloureux
Prononce dans la gorge avec des mots hébreux.

¹ Alfred de Vigny, *Les Destinées, Poèmes Philosophiques*, ed. Edmond Estève (Paris: Librairie E. Droz, 1931), p. 85.

² Judges 16:4.

The word "hébreux" is the first mention made of Samson's identity which is really secondary, since the poem is primarily concerned with the corruptive nature of woman.

Samson starts his chant in line 35 in which he speaks of the eternal truce between man and woman. In these lines he thinks not only of Delilah but of all women. Vigny perhaps was thinking of his male friends who like him had experienced the unfaithfulness of women.

Esteve cites Mme de Staël as the source of lines 35 - 38 by Alfred de Vigny:

Tant qu'il ne se fera pas dans les idées une révolution
quelconque qui change l'opinion des hommes sur la constance
que leur impose le lien du mariage, il y aura toujours
guerre entre les deux sexes, guerre secrète, éternelle,
russe, perfide, et dont la moralité de tous deux souffrira.¹

In the following line Samson reaffirms his opinion, "Car la Femme est un être impur de corps et d'âme," but despite this he writes in lines 39 - 42:

L'Homme a toujours besoin de caresse et d'amour;
Sa mère l'en abreuve alors qu'il vient au jour,
Et ce bras le premier l'engourdit, le balance
Et lui donne un désir d'amour et d'indolence.

In lines 41 - 50, Vigny mentions a Biblical incident which took place long after the story of Samson and Delilah. It appears that this citation was made to further emphasize the depravity of woman.

In the remaining lines Samson elaborates upon the fact that man always has need of a woman, lines 57 - 60:

Vient un autre combat plus secret, traître et lâche;
Sous son bras, sur son coeur se livre celui-la
Et, plus ou moins, la femme est toujours, DALILA.

¹

Esteve, op. cit., p. 88.

The repetition of the sound "s" further exemplifies the intense dislike that Samson has for the treacherous actions of Delilah. The adverb, "toujours," emphasizes the thought that women, in general, play Delilah's part. Vigny seems to conclude this stanza with his philosophy on women as he compares them to Delilah.

In lines 61 - 63, Samson mentions the clever, calculated coldness of women:

Elle rit et triomphe; en sa froideur savante,
Au milieu de ses soeurs elle attend et se vante
De ne rien éprouver des attentes du feu.

Lines 75 and 76 reveal that with the present state of woman God even repented having made her:

La Femme est, à présent, pire que dans ces temps
Ou, voyant les humains, Dieu dit: «Je me repens!»

Vigny was influenced by the Biblical quotation in Genesis VI: 5 - 7.

In the remaining lines of the second section, lines 81 - 108, the poem becomes very lyrical. Samson is now addressing God because he realizes the futility of his efforts against love:

Eternel! Dieu des Forts! vous savez que mon âme
N'avait pour aliment que l'amour d'une femme,
Puissant dans l'amour seul plus de sainte vigueur
Que mes cheveux divins n'en donnaient à mon cœur.

Samson mentions the Nazarite oath that his mother had taken for him, when he refers to "mes cheveux divins."

In line 86 he says: "Trois fois elle a vendu mes secrètes de ma vie." Samson is reflecting upon the three occasions in which Delilah had betrayed him. The number "trois fois" is verified by the citation in Judges XVI, 5-14.

In line 75 Samson relates one of his victories against the

Philistines. Now, realizing that the end is near because he has disclosed his secret, Samson repeats his conviction:

...ce compagnon dont le coeur n'est pas sûr.
La Femme, enfant malade et douze fois impur!

which is a repetition, for emphasis of line 36.

The conclusion of this section expresses a cry of surrender:

C'est trop...
J'ai donné mon secret, Dalila va le vendre.
...Ce qui sera, sera!

In the third and final division Vigny returns to the Biblical story. There are modifications, however, in Vigny's usage of the plot. In line 111 he writes: "Payant au poids de l'or chacun de ses cheveux," while in the Bible we read, "Entice him, ... and we will each give you eleven hundred pieces of silver."¹ Lines 112 and 113 illustrate another of these modifications: "Attachèrent ses mains et brûlèrent ses yeux." In the Bible it appears "...gouged out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him in bronze fetters; and he ground at the mill in the prison."² Lines 116 - 121 are complimentary to Judges XVI, 23 and 25.

Line 122, "Placèrent Dalila, pale prostituée," does not compare to any of the Biblical quotations. Estève mentions, however, that Vigny could have been influenced by Milton in Paradise Lost since he, Vigny, was such an ardent reader of English literature.³

The cry from Delilah: "IL NE ME VERRA PAS!" was not taken from

¹
Judges 16:5.

²
Judges 16:21.

³
Estève, op. cit., p. 94.

the Bible. Perhaps Vigny is reflecting upon the cravings of women for high positions in life. In attaining this goal, however, no satisfaction is gained, because their lovers have been made aware of their treacherous actions, and they are abandoned.

The following stanza is introduced by one of the favorite exclamations of the romantics, "Terre et Ciel!" Vigny, in mentioning these words, is soliciting the intervention of Heaven and Earth. He then mentions Samson's victory:

Ecrasa d'un seul coup, sous les débris mortel,
Ses trois mille ennemis, leurs dieux et leur autels?

The final stanza appears as a cry of Vigny's personal sentiment on the unfaithfulness of woman. In these four lines it seems as if he is proclaiming his distaste for such treacherous actions as were displayed by Delilah.

This poem depicts very vividly the philosophy of Alfred de Vigny on the perfidity of women. In the poem, "La Maison Berger," he referred to an ideal life that man would experience if he had a mate such as Eva. By contrast, the poem, "La Colère de Samson," reveals the unfaithful nature of woman. Like Samson, Vigny needed love which he sought constantly.

In one of his letters to Marie Dorval, although he realized her unfaithfulness he persisted in trying to change her:

Il n'est possible de ne pas soulager mon cœur en me plaignant de toi à toi-même. Tu me rends très malheureux. Je ne puis plus vivre ainsi. ... Je savais bien l'été dernier, lorsque j'étais malade et que, te voyant pleurer de voir ta destinée tourner si mal au théâtre, je savais à quelles attaques j'allais m'exposer en essayant de te sauver ...¹

¹ Vigny, *Correspondance*, Première Série (1816-1835), ed., M. Fernand Baldensperger, (Paris: Louis Conard, Libraire - Editeur 1913), pp. 386-87.

After two more years of writing ardent letters to Marie Dorval the relationship was finally terminated. Vigny had no companions with whom he could share his secrets, and he was too proud to reveal his personal feelings in his poems as the other romantic poets, Lamartine, Musset and Hugo, had done. His only emotional out-let, therefore, was through his writings in which he disguised his feelings by the use of symbols.

Since Alfred de Vigny experienced only disillusionments in his constant search for happiness, he developed a pessimistic attitude toward life. In the analysis of the poems, "La Maison du Berger," and "La Colère de Samson," we noticed two distinctly different philosophies of love. In the first poem, Vigny appeared optimistic, but in the second, after he had found his love, he revealed a pessimistic philosophy which originated from his bitter experiences, especially the unfaithfulness of his love, Marie Dorval. This philosophy of pessimism is more obvious in the poems, "Le Mont des Oliviers," and "La Mort du Loup." In chapter five an analysis will be made of these two poems revealing how the philosophy of Alfred de Vigny influenced his poetic compositions.

CHAPTER V

THE PHILOSOPHY OF ALFRED de VIGNY REVEALED IN:

"Le Mont des Olivier," and "La Mort du Loup"

The poem, "Le Mont des Oliviers,"¹ was published (with the exception of the conclusion, 'Le Silence,') in the Revue des Deux Mondes, June 1, 1844. The final stanza, 'Le Silence,' was composed in 1862.² Vigny is inspired by the Bible and the painting, "The Agony in the Garden," by Mantegna.³ He does not, however, imitate the entire Biblical story, instead he changes various aspects of the theme. In the poem, "Le Mont des Oliviers," the plot is very simple.

It is night, and Jesus walks alone in the Garden of Gethsamane. His disciples who are close by are overcome by a very heavy drowsiness thus leaving Him alone. Jesus, realizing the approach of His death, expresses an intense fear. He appears as a mere man instead of a supernatural and divine character. During this moment of apprehension, He prays to God. After a period of intensive supplication, Jesus, convinced that His pleas are useless, surrenders Himself to the will of God. Judas enters and betrays Him. In the stanza, 'Le Silence,' Vigny later adds his personal opinion on the impassibility of God toward His Son, Jesus.

¹ Vigny, "Le Mont des Oliviers," Poèmes Philosophiques, ed., Baldensperger, op. cit., p. 204. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations will be taken from this volume.

² Grant, op. cit., p. 115.

³ Ibid., p. 120.

There are four parts to this poem, and Vigny, very aptly describes the relationship between Jesus and His Father in each section. In this first part, the Son of God seeks compassion from His Father, who in return, remains completely impassive to the pleas of Jesus. This particular theme forms the basis of the poem, and Alfred de Vigny elaborates upon it, injecting very fittingly some of his personal beliefs. His own sentiments, however, are disguised by the use of symbols.

As usual, Vigny chooses night for the time of action, line 1: "Alors il était nuit ..." The time could be symbolic of the approaching death of Jesus. Then, the author describes the clothes that Jesus is wearing which reminds one of death:

... et Jésus marchait seul,
Vêtu de blanc ainsi qu'un mort de son linceul;

Vigny continues this solemn mood in the description of the scene. In line 3, the monotony is broken by the intervention of a faint wind. "Parmi les oliviers, qu'un vent sinistre incline." The adjective "sinistre" relates this line to the previous lines because of the meaning it conveys, evil omen. Throughout the first section Vigny employs words and phrases which seem to accentuate the solemnity of the time: "Triste jusqu'à la mort," "sombre et ténébreux," "le ciel reste noir," "Dieu ne réponds pas," "froid et lente," "une sueur sanglante," "il crie avec effroi," "un sommeil de mort," "un nuage en deuil," "une veuve," "la crainte," "Il eut froid," "vainement," "Le vent seul répondit à sa voix," and "la terre trembla."

The seriousness of the moment, however, is described, not only by the words and expressions, previously mentioned, but also by the frequent use of exclamations and abrupt sentences. For example, in line 12,

Jesus calls: "Mon Père!" and Vigny emphasizes the silence of God by writing, "Mais le ciel reste noir, et Dieu ne répond pas." Jesus, then, turns to his disciples, and again that conjunction, "mais," appears: "Mais un sommeul de mort accable les apôtres." He calls to Nature, and once more Vigny uses the conjunction, "mais:" "Mais un nuage en deuil s'étend comme le voile D'une veuve, ..." This frequent use of "Mais" describes very forcibly the uselessness of the pleas of Jesus.

The first section, therefore, describes the sadness of Jesus while in the Garden of Gethsamane. Vigny fuses the description of the time with the feeling and appearance of Jesus. Then he depicts the loneliness that Jesus experiences by mentioning the pleas for compassion that Jesus makes to nature, to man, and to God. Vigny further alludes to the indifference of God in line 30 when he writes:

... Vainement il appela trois fois:
'Mon Père!' -- Le vent seul répondit à sa voix.

This section, therefore, ends with these final cries from Jesus and the manner in which He receives the unconcerned attitude of His Father. In the analysis of the second section we shall see how Jesus reacts under this intense indifference which He receives from His Father.

In the second section, lines 35 - 130, Jesus again called to His Father "O Père, encor laisse-moi vivre!" He now states a desire to live. He, Jesus, claims that the earth is afraid to be left alone, lines 39 and 40:

C'est que la Terre a peur de rester seule et veuve,
Quand meurt celui qui dit une parole neuve.

It may be assumed that these lines express the fear of death which Jesus is experiencing at this apprehensive moment. Then, He concludes this

section of His prayer by mentioning the primary lesson that He has given to mankind. Canat, in discussing this poem, wrote the following concerning the word, "FRATERNITE:"

C'est en effet la grande leçon donnée par le Christ.
'Aimez-vous les uns les autres!' Toutefois il y a
autre chose dans l'Evangile, et ce n'est pas le seul
mot du ciel qu'ait prononcé Jesus.¹

This stanza, lines 35 - 46, does not correspond to any of the prayers which Jesus uttered during His agony in the Garden of Gethsamane. Estève has written the following concerning it:

Mais les paroles qui sont prêtées ici au Christ ne viennent pas de l'Evangile. Elles sont inspirées, d'une manière générale, du morceau déjà cité de Jean-Paul: Les morts s'écrivirent: O Christ! n'est-il point de Dieu? Il répondit. Il n'en est point. Toutes les ombres se prirent à trembler avec violence, et le Christ continua ainsi: J'ai parcouru les mondes, je me suis élevé jusqu'aux dernières limites de l'univers, j'ai regardé dans l'abîme, et je me suis écrié: Père; où es-tu? Mais je n'ai entendu que la pluie qui tombait goutte à goutte dans l'abîme, et l'éternelle tempête, que nul ordre ne régit, m'a seule répondu.²

In the following stanza, however, Vigny returns to the story as related in the Bible. He describes some of the deeds that Jesus has performed for mankind, lines 47 - 58. The author refers to the Last Supper in which Jesus had participated only a few hours before His agony in the Garden, lines 53 - 54:

Aux flots rouges du sang les flots vermeil du vin,
Aux membres de la chair le pain blanc sans levain.

Line 59 introduces a new thought. Jesus prays that His Father will have compassion for mankind. Estève claims that Vigny alludes to

¹
Canat, op. cit., p. 504.

²
Estève, op. cit., p. 116.

the theory on the reversibility of sufferings.¹ The innocents are made to suffer for the evils of others.

In lines 63 - 70, Vigny causes Jesus to foretell the manner in which His teaching will be interpreted. This particular technique which Vigny employs is very ingenious. Here, Vigny expresses his personal observations but the words which he gives to Jesus. He, Vigny, must have noticed the numerous interpretations given to religion, and in these lines he reflects upon them. In lines 70 - 77, Vigny causes Jesus to envision the implements with which suffering will be inflicted upon him:

Les verges qui viendront, la couronne d'épine,
Les clous des mains, la lance au fond de ma poitrine,
Enfin toute la croix qui se dresse et m'attend,
N'ont rien, Mon Père, oh! rien qui m'épouvante autant.

The author again injects his belief in the following stanza, lines 75 - 86. He implies that the Creation is incomplete: "ce globe incomplet," and "cette indigent terre." In line 86, Vigny introduces "le Doute et le Mal" which serve as a transition to the following stanza.

The final stanza of section two is primarily concerned with man's miserable condition on earth, which is symbolized in this poem by "Mal et Doute." Jesus, realizing this deplorable state of mankind, wants to dispose of these sources of man's unhappiness. In line 87, He claims that He can obliterate them by the use of only one word. "Mal et Doute! En un mot je puis les mettre en poudre." Jesus, therefore, desiring to erase man's misery asks His Father to allow Lazarus to disclose what he, Lazarus, learned during his death, lines 91 - 94:

Sur son tombeau desert faisons monter Lazare.

¹

Estève, op. cit., p. 118.

Du grand secret des morts qu'il ne soit plus avare,
 Et de ce qu'il a vu donnons-lui souvenir;
 Qu'il parle. ...

The mention of Lazarus refers to the Biblical story of Lazarus' resurrection and his presumed knowledge of death. If he, Lazarus, were to return and explain to mankind the various mysteries of life, then, "Mal et Doute" would be expunged.

Vigny, in lines 95 - 130, enumerates the mysteries which have perplexed mankind. This technique of Vigny is extremely admirable. Here, he disguises his personal sentiment by arranging the poem in such a manner that Lazarus will explain these mysteries for him. In line 117, he asks Lazarus to explain the triumph of evil over good?

Et pourquoi les Esprit du mal sont triomphants
 Des maux immérités de la mort des enfants;¹

The stanza then ends:

Tout sera révélé des que l'homme saura
 De quels lieux il arrive at dans quels il ira.

These lines "Tout sera ----- il ira" refer to the first line of this stanza when Jesus says: "En un mot je puis les mettres en poudre." According to Him, if mankind understands the mysteries then "Mal et Doute" will be forever erased.

In this section, therefore, Jesus not only expresses fear of His approaching death, but He indicates that His mission is not fully accomplished. He realizes however, that His end is near, and in the third section, He surrenders to the will of His Father.

Vigny returns to the description of the scene and of the position

¹

This theme is developed in his poem, "La Fille de Jephté."

of Jesus in the third section, lines 131 - 142. Jesus appears obedient to the wishes of His Father which is a great contrast to the personality He reveals in the two previous sections. In lines 133 and 134, he says:

... Que votre volonté
Soit faite en non la mienne et pour l'éternité!

Then, in lines 138 - 141, Vigny describes nature which adds to the gravity of the moment:

La terre sans clartés, sans astre et sans aurore,
Et sans clartés de l'âme ainsi qu'elle est encore,
Frémissait. ...

It is an exceedingly dark moment, even the heavenly elements are participating in the evil deed which is close at hand. The words used in this description are adequate. The repetition of the word "sans" emphasizes the darkness of the night. After the description, Judas appears on the scene, ending the monologue.

This third section is, in reality, the conclusion of the story. Vigny, in composing this section, relates it to the first section in his descriptions of Jesus and of the darkness of the night. The incessant repetition of the obscurity of the period adds to the somber atmosphere of this poem.

After having completed this poem, Alfred de Vigny added on April 2, 1862 the fourth and final section. Here, he questions the importance of prayer. He repeats his observation of the impassive manner in which the Son of God was treated by mankind, by nature and by God, and such indifference is the origin of his philosophy on stoicism. The poem which best exemplifies this philosophy of Vigny is "La Mort du Loup" which will be analyzed in the following paragraphs.

On February 1, 1843, Alfred de Vigny published "La Mort du Loup"¹ in the Revue des Deux Mondes.² In this poem he recounts an observation he made while hunting. After a careful study of the terrain, the hunters discover traces of wolves' tracks. They follow these tracks which lead them to the wolves. Before making their attack on the wolves, the hunters watch the young wolves at play. Soon the firing starts, and Vigny is impressed by the courageous action that the wolf, presumably the leader of the group, displays to the end. Then he, the wolf, dies without uttering a cry.

The poem is divided into three sections. In the first, Vigny describes the scene, the hunters, the wolves, and the slaying of the wolf, in the second he reflects upon the majestic death of the wolf, and in the third he discloses his philosophy on stoicism and pessimism.

As was noted in most of the other poems, the action takes place at night, line 1. "Les nuages couraient sur la lune enflammée." In the first section, lines 1 - 34, Vigny describes the mood of the poem thus preparing the reader for the events which are to follow.

The rhythm of the poem is slow which coincides with the gait of the hunters. The frequent use of the "enjambement" suggests the pauses the hunters make as they carefully tread along. Lines 10, 11, and 19 are examples of the distinct pauses that Vigny employs:

Et le pas suspendu. -- Ni le bois ni la plaine
Ne poussaient un soupir dans les airs; seulement ...

¹
Alfred de Vigny, "La Mort du Loup," Poèmes Philosophiques, ed. Baldensperger, op. cit., p. 198.

²
Grant, op. cit., p. 111.

A regarde le sable en s'y couchant; bientôt,

Vigny, having adequately prepared the reader for the action which is to follow by his description of the scene, of the hunters and of the mood of the poem, turns our attention to the wolves in a very ingenious manner. He refers to the oldest hunter who has noted newly made wolf tracks, lines 18, and 21 - 23:

Le plus vieux des chasseurs qui s'étaient mis en quête ...
A déclaré tout bas que ces marques récentes
Annonçaient la démarche et les griffes puissantes
De deux grands loups-cerviers et de deux louveteaux.

The reader, therefore, like the hunters, seem to follow those tracks which lead to the wolves. In line 23, "De deux ----- puissants," Vigny reveals the acumen of the oldest hunter, who through years of hunting, has developed this precise sense of tracking.

The author, then introduces the wolves to the reader, and gives a brief description of them as they appear in the moonlight night. In lines 29 and 30, Vigny refers to four wolves who seem to be dancing, then in lines 37 and 38, he speaks of the male who is standing against a tree, and of his mate who is resting near-by. His reference to the four figures which appear as dancers does not coincide with the interpretation of the tracks made by the oldest hunter. Perhaps, Vigny, in this observation, is confused by the shadows cast upon the wolves by the moon thus discerning four wolves.

Lines 29 - 40 demonstrate an extremely happy tableau of the he-wolf and his family. Vigny, however, insinuates that the happiness of this family is precarious, lines 34 - 36:

Mais les enfants du Loup se jouaient en silence,
Sachant bien qu'à deux pas, ne dormant qu'à demi
Se couche dans ses murs l'homme, leur ennemi.

This implication of the insecurity of the wolves is realized, lines 40 - 60, as Vigny describes the attack made by the wolf. In describing this attack, the author emphasizes the majestic and the heroic nature of the wolf:

Il s'est jugé perdu, puisqu'il était surpris,
 Sa retraite coupée et tous ses chemins pris;
 Alors il a saisi, dans sa gueule brûlante,
 Du chien le plus hardi la gorge pantelant,
 Et n'a pas desserré ses mâchoires de fer,
 Malgré nos coups de feu qui traversaient sa chair.

Vigny, in these lines, intimates that the wolf, realizing that his chance of escape is limited, seizes the largest hound and starts his fierce battle thus giving his family time to flee. These lines reveal also the courageous nature of the wolf as he unremittingly keeps the hound in his grasp until his goal is achieved, the escape of his family. The wolf, then, releases the dead hound, and in a majestic manner he dies, lines 53, 59 and 60:

Le Loup le quitte alors et puis il nous regarde ...
 Et, sans daigner savoir comment il a péri,
 Refermant ses grands yeux, meurt sans jeter un cri.

This first section is beautifully constructed. Vigny, in the first twenty lines, describes the scene and the hunters, then, in the remaining lines, he speaks of the wolves and finally he describes the death of the he-wolf. Although Vigny is among a group of hunters he relates his personal observations without crowding the plot with any unnecessary details. In lines 27 and 28 he removes himself from the group, and by the means of this technique he is able to relate his observations:

Trois s'arrêtent, et moi, cherchant ce qu'ils voyaient
 J'aperçois tout à coup deux yeux qui flamboyaient.

These lines, therefore, are an introduction the author's use of the

personal pronoun "je" which appears throughout the remaining lines of the poem. In the second section, therefore, Vigny makes a personal report of his reflections upon this majestic action displayed by the wolf.

The second section, lines 61 - 72, appears as a transition to the final part of the poem. Here, in the second section, Alfred de Vigny reflects upon the dignity of the wolf and his family, and on their rigorous sense of duty. These characteristics, dignity, pride, and sense of duty, have been used from time to time in the description of the character of Vigny. Perhaps this is his reason for admiring the tenacity of the he-wolf. In the third section we shall see how the reflections he makes in section two affect his philosophy.

Vigny, in the third section of this poem, lines 75 - 88, reveals his philosophy of stoicism and pessimism. In the first two lines of this division, the author discloses his belief that mankind is weak. Then, by contrast he mentions the strength of the wolf from whom mankind can take a lesson, lines 75 and 76:

Comment on doit quitter la vie et tous ses maux,
C'est vous qui le savez, sublimes animaux!

This sentence serves as an introduction to the remaining lines of the stanza because Vigny elaborates upon this thought in lines 79 - 84, and then he concludes with his philosophy of stoicism, lines 85 - 88.

In line 78, the author is still reflecting upon the courageous action of the wolf and he says "Seul le silence est grand; tout le reste est faiblesse." This particular sentence summarizes all that he insinuates in lines 73 - 77. The word "le silence" refers to the death of the wolf, therefore, Vigny implies that silence in the face of distress symbolizes greatness.

The author continues this thought of the greatness of silence and the lesson that the wolf teaches in lines 79 - 84. Vigny, in lines 81 - 88, explains the significance of the last gaze of the wolf. In line 81, Vigny implies that by the use of the familiar term of the second person singular form, "tu," the wolf is equal, if not superior to mankind, by his last glance, so, the wolf, addresses man in that superior manner:

"Il disait: 'Si tu peux, fais que ton âme arrive.'"

The last four lines of the poem conclude the lesson that Vigny learns from this proud wolf:

Gémir, pleurer, prier, est également lâche.
Fais énergiquement ta longue et lourde tâche
Dans la voie où le Sort a voulu t'appeler,
Puis après, comme moi, souffre et meurs sans
parler.

In line 85 Vigny enumerates the utterances that man makes during suffering, these, apparently to him, are the symbols of a coward. In these four concluding lines, Vigny may be thinking of the disillusionments in his life, he formulates, therefore, a philosophy of stoicism as his guide.

This poem, which praises the wolf that fights to the last and dies in silence, draws the conclusion that "silence alone is great, all else is weakness," is one of the most famous poems of Alfred de Vigny. The poet seems to be obsessed by the need for silence in the face of oppression. In the poem, "Le Mont des Oliviers," he describes the futility of the pleas of Jesus. He demonstrates repeatedly how nature, man and God remained silent during the prayers that Jesus offered. Then to emphasize this indifference he adds the stanza 'Le Silence,' which justifies his belief that man should remain silent in the face of

oppression. Alfred de Vigny, therefore, accepted this stoical attitude which, to him, seemed more dignified than the outpouring of one's personal life to the public as the other romantic poets frequently did.

Conclusion

In the analysis of these five poems by Alfred de Vigny, it is interesting to note how his life and the disappointments he experienced influenced his writings. The poem, "Moïse," reveals his opinion on the unappreciated role of the genius, "La Maison du Berger," expresses the need for an understanding companion in life, "La Colère de Samson," discusses the unfaithfulness of woman, "Le Mont des Oliviers," exhibits the futility of praying, crying and groaning, and "La Mort du Loup," praises silence in the face of oppression. These poems were analyzed in this particular order, although they are not chronologically arranged, because this arrangement seems to coincide with the order in which the poet faced his various crises of his life.

Although all these poems by Vigny are lyrical, the poet disguised his feelings with the use of symbols, thus making his poems applicable to his situation as well as universal. Moses, the hero of the poem, "Moïse," refers, therefore, to Alfred de Vigny and his role as poet, as well as to poets and to leaders, in general. This technique indicates that Vigny gave much thought to the composition of his poems.

The metrical composition, "La Maison du Berger," is another example of a thoughtful and timely prepared work. There are, however, some sections which seem entirely unrelated to the plot which do not in any way subtract from the greatness of his construction. In this poem, Vigny discusses most of the romantic themes, love, nature, solitude, and

the function of the poet. This poem is basically antithetical in construction and in this manner, Vigny is able to present the pros and cons of the themes. It is in this poem that he reveals his intense dislike for nature, and by contrast he mentions the warmth and understanding man obtains from woman.

Later, in the analysis of "La Colère de Samson," it is revealed how this admiration for woman changes to a dislike nearly as strong as that expressed on nature in "La Maison du Berger." This particular feeling was influenced by the unfaithful actions of his mistress, Marie Dorval. Vigny was by nature of a stern and sincere character; therefore, the pernicious actions of Marie Dorval greatly infuriated him. Here again, his use of symbols generalizes this unfaithful action of woman, and it may be concluded that he speaks of women, in general.

Alfred de Vigny, after all these disillusionments in his life, revealed how futile prayers are, in his poem, "Le Mont des Oliviers." In this poem, Vigny describes the indifferences Jesus had experienced from man, from nature, and from God. Vigny, in the final stanza of this poem, reflects upon the silence God displays to His Son during the moment of agony, and it is because of this silence and indifference that the poet formed his particular philosophy.

Finally, in the poem, "La Mort du Loup," he elaborates upon the need for silence during adversity. This poem is usually mentioned when referring to the philosophy of Alfred de Vigny because in this poem, the poet states very precisely his philosophy on stoicism and pessimism.

Alfred de Vigny, therefore, may be called the philosophical poet

of the romantic poets. Unlike the other poets, his poems were essentially impersonal, clothed in sobriety, saturated with thoughtful experiences, disguised by symbols, and extremely pessimistic.

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